

ABBREVIATED HISTORY

OF THE

DAI-BUTSU

AT THE

KŌ-TOKU-IN MONASTERY,

KAMAKURA.

“THE *Dai-butsu*, or *Great Buddha*, stands alone among
“ Japanese works of art. No other gives such an
“ impression of majesty, or so truly symbolises the central
“ idea of Buddhism—the intellectual calm which comes of
“ perfected knowledge and the subjugation of all passion.”

Murray's Hand-Book of Japan.

THE HISTORY OF THE


REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

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The Dai-butsu at Kamakura.

IN the ground of the "Kō-toku-in" (Jōdō Sect) Monastery of Kamakura, situated but a short distance from the village of Hase, and the sea-coast, is preserved one of the most remarkable representations of the Buddha which Japan has produced—an image so perfect that it is regarded as the culmination of the art of bronze-casting in our country.

MR. BAYARD TAYLOR says in his work *Japan, In Our Day*, that "The Monument dedicated to Dai-butsu, that is, the Great Buddha, may be considered as the most complete work of the Japanese genius, in regard both to Art and to the religious sentiment . . . a gigantic seated divinity of bronze, with folded hands, and head gently inclined in an attitude of contemplative ecstasy. . . . There is an irresistible charm in the posture of Dai-butsu, in the harmony of his bodily proportions, in the noble simplicity of his drapery, and in the calmness and serenity of the countenance."

MR. A. C. MACLAY, A.M., L.L.B., in *A Budget of Letters from Japan*, says—"The Dai-butsu sits there in the open air, his head looming above the pine-trees, and his face turned toward the peaceful waters of the ocean—typical of the dreamless Nirvana."

MR. PERCIVAL LOWELL says in *The Soul of the Far East*—"The Kamakura Buddha . . . in whose face all that is grand and noble lies sleeping, the living representation of Nirvana."

DR. C. DRESSER, PH. D., F.L.S., Etc., in *Japan—Its Architecture*, says "The figure sits in dignified repose with a most placid expression of countenance. From its forehead protudes a boss representing a jewel from which light is supposed to flow, and which symbolises an idea similar to that expressed in our Scriptures—"I am the light of the World."

It is the endeavour of the priests in charge of the Monastery to preserve and embellish the Image and Church and to raise a suitable edifice to contain the Dai-butsu and protect it from the ravages of time and the effects of the weather so that they may faithfully hand down and transmit to posterity this relic of mediæval days which they have received from their predecessors as a precious and sacred National trust, and it is therefore hoped that, in the interest of Religion, Art and History alike, all visitors will kindly make some contribution to the building fund, as Japan is not a rich country, and to collect a sum of money sufficient to carry out the object successfully is at best a work of many years, especially when it is borne in mind that the Meiji Government has confiscated all Ecclesiastical possessions and disestablished the Buddhist Church, thereby leaving the priests well-nigh penniless.



Abbreviated History of the Dai-butsu.

THERE has been a temple in this place since the 8th century, but the image is of much later date. Its precise history is involved in obscurity. Tradition, however, says that the Shōgun YORITOMO, when taking part in the dedication of the restored Dai-butsu at Nara in the 6th year of Kenkyū (1195 A.D.), to which place he had been summoned by the Emperor to supervise the ceremony, conceived the desire of having a similar object of worship at his own Capital, but died before he could put his plan into execution. One of his waiting ladies, Itano no Tsubone, undertook to collect funds for the purpose and resigned her appointment and with the cordial approval of Masago (the relict of YORITOMO) and the Shōgun YORITSUGU, worked with such devotion of heart that in the 1st year of Gen-nin (1224 A.D.) the priest Jōkō (who had collected money far and wide) with the permission of the Emperor, was enabled to commence the first image (which was of wood) and it was completed in the 1st year of Rekinin (1238 A.D.). A splendid chapel was also constructed here in the 1st year of Kwan-gen (1243 A.D.). In the Autumn of the 2nd year of Hōji (1248 A.D.) the chapel was overthrown by a mighty storm, and the image seriously damaged. Again Itano no Tsubone bestirred herself in the work, being assisted by the Shōgun Prince MUNETAKA, who provided the metal to cast a bronze image, and restored the Temple in all its former splendor.

The image was commenced in the 4th year of Kenchō, the 8th month and the 17th day, and the founder was ŌNO GO-RO-YE-MON, an artificer of Yanamura in the county of Mōda, Province of Kadzusa.

This was the first time that such a marvellous piece of metal work had been thus successfully attempted in Japan, and the perfect artistic mastery of form and true beauty

and grandeur of outline which characterize Ōno's masterpiece, is a wonderful triumph of Japanese Glyptic Art.

The Temple was completely destroyed by storms twice, once in the 2nd year of Kemmu (1335 A.D.) and once in the 2nd year of Ōan (1369 A.D.), but was repaired. Again in the 4th year of Mei-ō (1495 A.D.) the buildings were swept away by a tidal wave, but this time the priests were unable to raise funds for their restoration and only the image and the stone foundations of the church were left.

In the period of Shōtoku (1711-1715 A.D.) a Buddhist Archbishop named YŪTEN rebuilt the priest's residence and a certain NOJIMA YASUSUKE furnished money liberally and presented votive bronze lanterns and various ornaments to the church, but the funds failed and the work of complete restoration was abandoned.

Measurements of the Dai-butsu are :

	Ft.	In.
Height	49	7.00
Circumference	97	2.20
Length of face	8	5.15
Width from ear to ear.	17	9.20
Round white boss on forehead	1	3.47
Length of eye	3	11.60
Length of eyebrow	4	1.98
" " ear	6	6.54
" " nose	3	9.22
" " mouth	3	2.08
Height of bump of wisdom		9.52
Diameter of bump of wisdom	2	4.56
Curls (of which there are 830): Height.		9.52
" " " " " " : Diameter		11.90
Length from knee to knee	35	8.40
Circumference of thumb (say)	3	0.00

The eyes are pure gold and the silver boss weighs 30 pounds avoirdupois. The image is formed of sheets of bronze cast separately, brazed together and finished off on the outside with the chisel.

Kamakura.

Natsu=kusa ya

Tsuwamono domo no

Yume no ato. ⁽¹⁾

BASHŌ.

City of dreamland—ruined and sad,
Once home of a people joyous and glad.
All that is left—"a tale that is told,"
Temples dismantled and monuments cold.

Ashes to ashes—dust unto dust,
Glory departed—swords turned to rust.
Weeds—all that is left of hearts brave and gay
Who 'erst to the battle went marching away.

Citadel perished—towers fallen away,
Fortress and temple doomed to decay,
Courtier and Warrior in panoply bright
Passed like a shadowy dream of the night.

Oh Buddha Eternal!—Thus come we and go.
Fleeting is matter—"SHO-GYŌ MUJŌ."⁽²⁾
Such were thy words—"What waxeth must wane,"
After calm there is storm—after sunshine the rain.
"Naught is a permanence"—glory but show
That leads to destruction—"ZESHO MEPPŌ."⁽³⁾

(1) A dream of the past! In the place of warriors the grass and plants of Summer.

(2) All phenomena are impermanent.

(3) They are subject to the law of origination and perishing.

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